

Message Text

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TO USDEL SECRETARY IMMEDIATE

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E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MARR, NATO

SUBJECT: ACTION MEMORANDUM - ATLANTIC FLEET

-- CARRIERS AND THE DPQ (S/S 7616969)

FOR THE SECRETARY FROM VEST & ARMITAGE (ACTING), THRU HABIB

THE PROBLEM

1. THE CURRENT DOD POSTURE STATEMENT CALLS FOR DECOMMISSION-
ING ONE OF THE ATLANTIC FLEET CARRIERS IN OCTOBER, 1977
LEAVING REMAINING ACTIVE CARRIER STRENGTH AT SIX FOR THE
ATLANTIC FLEET PLUS SIX IN THE PACIFIC. (A THIRTEENTH
CARRIER WILL BE KEPT ON THE US PACIFIC COAST, WITHOUT AN
AIR WING, FOR TRAINING PURPOSES). THE US REPLY TO THE 1976
NATO DEFENSE PLANNING QUESTIONNAIRE (DPQ) COMMITS OUR
FORCES TO NATO FOR CALENDAR YEAR 1977 AND PROJECTS FORCE

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LEVELS, WITHOUT FORMAL COMMITMENT, FOR THE SUBSEQUENT FOUR

YEARS. AN OVERALL LEVEL OF SIX CARRIERS IN THE ATLANTIC FLEET WILL NO LONGER PERMIT US TO CONTINUE TO MAINTAIN UNBROKEN A-1 (AVAILABLE WITHIN 48 HOURS) READINESS STATUS FOR TWO CARRIERS IN THE ATLANTIC COMMITTED TO SACLANT AFTER OCTOBER 1977. A-1 STATUS FOR TWO CARRIERS COMMITTED TO SACEUR IN THE MEDITERRANEAN WILL NOT BE AFFECTED. THE IMMEDIATE PROBLEM IS THAT OF DEALING WITH THE IMPENDING CHANGES FOR SACLANT IN THE 1976 DPQ RESPONSE .

2. ESSENTIALLY THERE ARE TWO OPTIONS:

OPTION ONE: DROP A-1 STATUS FOR ONE SACLANT CARRIER AFTER 1977

WE WOULD:

(A) SHOW TWO SACLANT AIRCRAFT CARRIERS IN CATEGORY A-1 STATUS THROUGH 1977, FOOTNOTING THE 1977 FIGURE AS FOLLOWS: "COMMENCING IN LATE 1977 WHEN THE ATLANTIC FLEET FORCE LEVEL OF CARRIERS WHICH ROUTINELY DEPLOY IS DECREASED FROM SEVEN TO SIX, IT WILL BECOME DIFFICULT TO MAINTAIN MORE THAN ONE CARRIER ASSIGNED TO SACLANT IN A-1 CATEGORY."

(B) SHOW ONE SACLANT CARRIER IN CATEGORY A-1 AND ONE IN CATEGORY A-3 (AVAILABLE IN 5-15 DAYS) IN THE YEARS 1978 THROUGH 1981. FOOTNOTE THESE ENTRIES AS FOLLOWS: "BECAUSE OF THE REDUCTION OF THE NUMBER OF LANTFLT CARRIERS AVAILABLE FOR ROUTINE DEPLOYMENT FROM SEVEN TO SIX BEGINNING ON 1 OCTOBER 1977, ONLY ONE CARRIER WILL BE AVAILABLE TO SACLANT IN THE A-1 CATEGORY. THE CARRIER SHOWN IN THE A-3 CATEGORY WILL BE AVAILABLE IN A STATUS EQUIVALENT TO A-1 DURING A PORTION OF EACH YEAR."

PRO

1) CONSONANT WITH THE CURRENT REALITIES OF DECLINING CARRIER LEVELS;

2) ALLIES WILL AT LEAST UNDERSTAND THAT WE ARE CANDIDLY BROACHING SIGNIFICANT FORCE DEPLOYMENT PROBLEMS WITH THEM, THE OUTLINES OF WHICH THEY ARE SURELY ALREADY AWARE.

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CON

1) MAY BE READ BY ALLIES AS A DECLINING US COMMITMENT, DESPITE THE SIGNIFICANT RECENT INCREASES IN OUR OTHER FORCES FOR NATO (TWO NEW ARMY BRIGADES, ADDITIONAL POSEIDONS, F-111S, F-15, RETENTION OF F-4S)

2) LEAVES US VULNERABLE TO POTENTIAL CHARGE THAT WE HAVE

RESPONDED TO APPEARANCE OF NEW SOVIET CARRIER KIEV IN ATLANTIC BY CUTTING BACK OUR CARRIER PRESENCE.

OPTION TWO: CONTINUE TO SHOW A-1 STATUS FOR BOTH SACLANT CARRIERS THRU 1981

THIS OPTION, WHICH IS ESSENTIALLY PRESENTATIONAL MIGHT SERVE TO SOFTEN SOME ALLIED CONCERNS REGARDING OUR COMMITMENT. AWARE OF PROJECTED LOWER CARRIER FORCE LEVEL,

HOWEVER, THEY WILL CLOSELY QUESTION US ON THE VALIDITY OF THE DECLARED A-1 STATUS FOR BOTH SACLANT CARRIERS. GIVEN PROJECTED ATLANTIC CARRIER LEVEL OF SIX AFTER OCTOBER 1977, ONE SACLANT CARRIER WILL DEFACTO BE FORCED TO DROP BELOW A-1 STATUS FOR A CONSIDERABLE PORTION OF EVERY YEAR, AND SOME ALLIED EXPERTS MAY FIGURE THIS OUT.

PRO

- 1) WOULD AVOID STIMULATING ALLIED CONCERNS ON OUR CARRIER FORCE COMMITMENT.
- 2) POSTPONES ANNOUNCEMENT OF REDCTION UNTIL SUCH TIME AS IT MUST BE REFLECTED IN ACTUAL FORCE COMMITMENTS.

CON

- 1) MIGHT BE LOOKED UPON AS LESS THAN CANDID BY OTHER ALLIES, WHO ARE AWARE OF THE PROBLEMS CREATED BY DECLINING OVERALL CARRIER LEVELS. COULD DEGRADE THE WORTH OF THE DPQ AS A SERIOUS PLANNING TOOL.

RECOMMENDATION:

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DOD AND THE NAVY HAVE STRONGLY RESISTED OPTION TWO AND HAVE SAID THEY WILL TAKE ISSUE TO TOP IN DOD. ON THE BASIS OF PRESENT, PUBLICLY KNOWN, PROJECTIONS OPTION ONE GIVES THE CLEAREST PICTURE OF OUR INTENTIONS AT THIS TIME. HOWEVER, OUR SACLANT CARRIERS WILL BE IN A-1 STATUS THROUGH OCTOBER OF 1977. BY THE TIME OF OUR NEXT DPQ SUBMISSION IN AUGUST OF 1977 WE WILL HAVE A CLEARER PICTURE OF WHAT WE WILL ACTUALLY WANT TO DO IN 1978 AND BEYOND THAN WE DO NOW. GIVEN THIS WE SEE NO COMPELLING NEED AT THIS TIME TO RAISE THE ISSUE OF CARRIER READINESS BEYOND OCTOBER OF 1977. WE RECOMMEND OPTION 2.

OPTIONS

OPTION ONE: DROP A-1 STATUS FOR ONE SACLANT CARRIER AFTER

1977.

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OPTION TWO: CONTINUE TO SHOW A-1 STATUS FOR BOTH SACLANT
CARRIERS THROUGH 1981.

APPROVE DISAPPROVE

4. DRAFTED: PM - J.A. GRAHAM; CLEARANCE - C:MONTGOMERY
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HABIB

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